

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BRUSSE 10362 191202Z

43

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AS-01 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00

DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 (ISO) W

----- 080700

R 191102Z NOV 75

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5430

INFO AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT BE

SUBJECT: TINDEMANS RETAINS POPULARITY DESPITE RECESSION
AND COALITION BICKERING

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

SUMMARY. INDEPENDENT PUBLIC OPINION POLL SHOWS PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS CONTINUES TO GET GOOD MARKS FROM BELGIAN PUBLIC DESPITE CONTINUING ECONOMIC SLUMP AND AN UNRULY GOVERNMENT COALITION. FORTY-FIVE PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED THOUGHT TINDEMANS' STANDING HAD IMPROVED IN PAST SIX MONTHS-MORE THAN TWICE THOSE WHO THOUGHT HE HAD SLIPPED. TINDEMANS' GOVERNMENT GOT GOOD MARKS FOR PERFORMANCE FROM 35 PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED AS AGAINST 17 PERCENT WITH NEGATIVE JUDGMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. RECENT POLL BY INDEPENDENT INSOP PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH INSTITUTE SHOWS PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS CONTINUES TO ENJOY FAVORABLE OPINION AMONG LARGE SEGMENT OF BELGIAN POPULATION EVEN THOUGH HIS GOVERNMENT IS HAVING A DIFFICULT TIME IN PARLIAMENT. OF THOSE POLLED THROUGHOUT COUNTRY 45.2 PERCENT THOUGHT HIS STANDING HAD IMPROVED WHILE ONLY 21.6 SAW HIM DECLINING; 21.9 SAW HIS POSITION UNCHANGED; 10.3 HAD NO OPINION AND ONLY 1.9 PERCENT DID NOT KNOW HIM.

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PAGE 02 BRUSSE 10362 191202Z

2. HIS CLOSEST RIVAL IS MINFINANCE WILLY DE CLERCQ WHO RECEIVED FOLLOWING RESPECTIVE SCORES: 31.4, 16.7, 32.7, 14.8 AND 4.2. AMONG OTHERS ON POLLERS' LIST ONLY SOCIALIST ON THE RISE WAS HENRI SIMONET, VICE PRESIDENT OF EC COMMISSION, WHO IS SLATED TO RETURN TO BELGIAN POLITICAL SCENE IN 1976. SOME 16.6 PERCENT SAW HIS STANDING IMPROVING WHILE 15 PERCENT THOUGHT HE HAD DECLINED; 31.6 SAW NO CHANGE; AND 11.5 PERCENT DID NOT KNOW HIM.

3. MINDEFENSE VANDEN BOEYNANTS WAS THE GOVERNMENT LEADER MOST IN DECLINE IN PUBLIC ESTEEM. ONLY 10.7 SAW HIS STANDING IMPROVING AND 35.3 SAW HIS POSITION DECLINING, WHILE 35.7 SAW NO CHANGE. AFTER TINDEMANS, HE IS THE BEST-KNOWN POLITICIAN IN BELGIUM-UNKNOWN TO ONLY 2.5 PERCENT.

4. IN SAME POLL, ACTION OF GOVERNMENT WAS JUDGED AT "VERY GOOD" OR "FAIRLY GOOD" BY 35 PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED. WHILE IT WAS JUDGED "FAIRLY BAD" OR "VERY BAD" BY 17 PERCENT. THIS REPRESENTS A SLIGHT WEAKENING OF FAVORABLE ATTITUDE TOWARD GOVERNMENT SINCE MAY, 1975 WHEN SAME QUESTION WAS ASKED. HOWEVER, THOSE CRITICIZING GOVERNMENT ALSO DECREASED WHILE NUMBER OF THOS WITHOUT OPINION INCREASED FROM 3.1 TO 14.5. GOVERNMENT RECEIVED LOWEST MARKS IN THE ECONOMIC POLICY FIELD WHERE 35 PERCENT SAW GOVERNMENT ACTION AS "FAIRLY BAD" TO "VERY BAD".

END UNCLASSIFIED

5. COMMENT: POLL RESULTS UNDERLINE THE FACT THAT THE STRONGEST ASSET IN THE PRESENT TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT IS THE PERSONAL POPULARITY OF ITS LEADER. THE NEGATIVE JUDGMENT OF GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF RECESSION AND THE SHARP RISE IN PROPORTION OF "DON'T KNOWS" IN JUDGING GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE OVERALL NEVERTHELESS UNDERLINE THE FACT THAT GOVERNMENT IS FAR FROM MASTERING THE TROUBLESOME POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS CURRENTLY AFFLICTING BELGIUM. (COMPREHENSIVE AIRGRAM REPORT TO FOLLOW).FIRESTONE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PUBLIC ATTITUDES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 NOV 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BRUSSE10362
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750403-0348
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751130/aaaabaee.tel
Line Count: 98
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <28 APR 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <29 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TINDEMANS RETAINS POPULARITY DESPITE RECESSION AND COALITION BICKERING
TAGS: PINT, BE
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006